

Rep Braley Introduces Bill Requiring Explosives Screening Report from DHS

The Hill

January 17, 2010

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As word of possible future terrorist attacks filtered through the intelligence community last week, Congress has been narrowing its focus on the failed Christmas Day attacks to assess what went wrong and how to make sure it doesn't happen again.

Rep. Bruce Braley (D-Iowa) is leading the way in the House, as he introduced a measure this week that would require the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to submit to Congress a report on the use of airport screening technology for explosives.

Braley's legislation would require DHS to give Congress its assessment of the efficacy of using bomb swabbing technology — used primarily for carry-on luggage — on passengers, by swabbing their hands or shirt sleeves.

The report would assess the effectiveness and privacy concerns of measures like the controversial whole-body imaging technology, as well as canine explosives detection teams.

The bill, known as the The Protect the Lives of Americans Now through Enhanced Screening (PLANES) Act, would also require DHS to spell out a plan "to ensure the rapid deployment and enhanced use of the most effective technologies to keep American air passengers safe." And it would ensure that all foreign airports with U.S.-bound flights employ domestic screening technologies and standards.

"As we saw from the attempted bombing of Northwest Flight 253 on Christmas Day, there is significant room for improvement in the use of explosives detection technologies for passenger

screening, especially at foreign airports," Braley said in a statement.

"I believe it's critical that we enhance our efforts to strengthen airport security while also ensuring we don't violate the rights of American citizens."

Braley said that his measure was not intended to supplement or trump the heightened security steps — such as more air marshals aboard passenger flights and more canine bomb detection units — taken by the Obama administration but rather to work in conjunction with them.

Last week DHS began conducting random inspections at airports throughout the country, looking for explosives, as intelligence officials had been hearing murmurs of another planned al-Qaeda attack, though the details of such a strike remained murky, according to the New York Times.

The Senate Homeland Security Committee, chaired by Sen. Joe Lieberman (I-Conn.), is also expected to hold a hearing next Wednesday on the intelligence failures leading up to the failed Christmas Day attack, in which a man attempted to ignite a plastic explosive concealed in his underwear.

Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano and DHS have taken heat from both sides of the aisle over the past several weeks for not piecing together the intelligence to prevent the Christmas Day bombing attempt. Some GOP lawmakers went so far as to call for her resignation.

Napolitano is expected to deliver testimony at the Wednesday Senate hearing, as are director of National Intelligence Dennis Blair and National Counterterrorism Center Director Michael Leiter. Leiter has taken heat from critics for not cutting his ski vacation short after the attack on Flight 253.